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ABSTRACT

A study analyzed the opening and closing sequences of 11 dyads of native Spanish-speakers in natural telephone conversations conducted in Spanish. The objective was to determine how closely Hispanic cultural patterns of conduct for telephone conversations follow the sequences outlined in previous research. It is concluded that Spanish conversational norms do fall within one theorist's scheme of universality, while at the same time showing unique sequential variations. These variations may or may not be culture-specific, a point that can only be determined through further investigation. Contains 15 references. (MSE)

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Openings and Closings in Telephone Conversations between Native Spanish Speakers

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The current investigation contributes new data to a growing body of work on cultural universalities vs. particularities in the functions performed in telephone opening and closing sequences. While telephone conversations in many languages and cultures have been studied, the Spanish language is conspicuously absent in the literature. The present work addresses this lack, augmenting available linguistic data with the novel contribution of Spanish to the database. In this presentation, I offer my analysis of the opening and closing sequences of 11 dyads in natural telephone conversations conducted in Spanish. I attempt to determine how closely Hispanic cultural patterns of conduct for telephone conversations follow the sequences outlined in previous works by Schegloff, Hopper, and other researchers. I conclude that Hispanic conversational norms do indeed fall within Schegloff's canonical schema of universality, while at the same time exhibiting unique sequential variations. These variations may or may not be culture-specific, a point which can only be determined through further investigation.

Introduction

Conversational analysis of telephone conversations is a fairly well established area of investigation, beginning in the late 1960's with Schegloff's (1967) dissertation on conversational openings. Since that time, numerous researchers have advanced the study of telephone interactions, both between members of the same culture (Hopper 1989; Hopper, Doany, Johnson & Drummond 1991; Hopper & Drummond 1989; Lindström 1994; Schegloff 1979, 1970, 1968, 1967; and Schegloff & Sacks 1973) and across cultures (Godard 1977; Halmari 1993; Hopper & Koleilat-Doany 1989; and Sifianou 1989). Languages investigated range from English and French to Greek and Finnish. This is clearly a broad range, including some less commonly spoken languages; one would assume that within such a range, most of the more commonly spoken languages would be represented. However, in all the studies I have examined, Spanish, which is one of the five most widely spoken languages in the world, is notable by its absence in the literature. Hopper (1992) offers a brief description of dif-

ferent ways of answering the telephone in the Spanish-speaking world, but no formal research seems to have been done in this area.

Many of the researchers cited above concentrate on aspects of the openings and closings of conversations, such as turn-taking, initiation of sequences, etc. Hopper and Schegloff are two researchers who individually have done much work in this area, and I have relied on their theoretical underpinnings to ground my own work. In all of his investigations, in fact, Schegloff deals specifically with the sequences involved in the openings of telephone conversations, which he breaks down into four adjacency pairs: (1) summons/response; (2) identification/recognition; (3) a greeting adjacency pair; and (4) a "how are you" adjacency pair.

Godard (1977) offers an objection to Schegloff's work. She argues that his "summons-response" sequence cannot be universally applied, and maintains that it is important to take cultural aspects into consideration. In doing her own analysis of French and English conversations, she found that some of Schegloff's categories and/or theorizing did not fit well with her own data. Godard concludes that some of Schegloff's work is culture-specific and it cannot be applied universally to telephone conversations in all languages.

Hopper et al. (1990-91) use Schegloff's work to determine the extent to which Schegloff's set of four opening sequences might be universally applicable and which elements might be specific to North American culture. Hopper et al. disagree with Godard's contention that cultural specificity significantly affects the sequences necessary to open a conversation. Rather, they argue that such cultural differences will have more to do with the actual content, or perhaps the order of the sequences, than with the functions they serve: "We argue that the different sounds of telephone openings in different languages mask similarities to what was sketched in the canonical telephone opening" (Hopper et al. 1990-91: 375).

Hopper (1989) mentions another interesting aspect of opening sequences which could be significant in some cases. He describes the different functions that opening sequences may serve, and how those functions are used to serve varying conversational needs. He specifically examines the opening sequence in which the caller (a) asks the answerer (b) how s/he is doing. This sequence, he maintains, serves more as a "pre-invitation" than as merely an inquiry into one's state of health. It provides the opportunity to offer other than just health information; for instance, in the case of this article, to inform a that b currently has another caller on hold.

In this paper, I will analyze the interactions of native Spanish speakers in telephone conversations conducted in Spanish - specifically, the etiquette involved in openings and closings of such conversations - to determine to what extent this data fits within Schegloff's theoretical models of sequencing in openings and closings. At the same time, I will look at some cultural implications inherent in my data, in accord with the observations of such researchers as Godard (1977) and Sifianou (1989). Finally, I will highlight

the relevance of my investigation for second language teaching and learning

All of the researchers cited previously raise valid points to keep in mind when analyzing data from another culture based on previous research for English. However, I find very persuasive Hopper et al.'s assertion that "Schegloff's (1979) discussion of identification and recognition includes virtually every format that have [sic] been argued as being unique to Greece, France or Holland - and all from North American data!" (1990-91: 378). Overall, then, I will rely heavily on frameworks pioneered by Schegloff (1968; 1973, with Sacks; 1979) and further elaborated by Hopper (1989; 1989, with Koleilat-Doany; 1991, with Doany, Johnson and Drummond; 1992) in structuring my analysis. I will also draw on cultural implications in my discussion and conclusions, keeping in mind points raised by those researchers concerned with cultural specificity.

Methodology

The current work will focus exclusively on data collected from native speakers of Spanish from a variety of Latin American countries. While I am not specifically doing a comparative analysis with English or other languages, there will necessarily be some comparative conclusions drawn. It is through such cross-cultural comparisons that the greatest relevance to second language learning will be realized.

Research questions

I am interested in investigating three questions in particular regarding telephone conversation openings and closings. Two of them deal with the opening sequences. The third focuses on the closing. The questions are:

(1) Does there appear to be a standard formula used in beginning a telephone conversation among Spanish speakers as suggested by Schegloff?

(2) Do Spanish speakers move immediately to the purpose of the call, or do they follow a pattern of information exchange before the "real" conversation begins?

This is addressed by Schegloff's final adjacency pair sequence, which Hopper and Koleilat-Doany (1989: 163) list as step 4, a "how are you" or inquiry sequence in which each participant offers an initial inquiry about the other. Some of the cross-cultural studies seem to indicate that the answer to this question is culture-specific. For instance, Halmari (1993) indicates that in business calls, at least, Americans have a tendency to get straight to the point, with little in the way of preliminary pleasantries, while Finns are much more likely to make some kind of polite conversation before talking about business.

(3) The third question actually has three parts: Are there any specific verbal cues the speakers use to prepare to close the conversation? If so, is there a standard formula for closing once a speaker has signaled his intention via these verbal cues that he wants to terminate the conversation? Finally, who typically terminates the conversation, the caller or the recipient?

Schegloff and Sacks (1973) also address some of these issues, proposing somewhat fluid categories such as preclosings, new topic initiation and final closings. The researchers do not summarize these divisions into such neat and tidy categories as the opening sequences. This is due to the much more fluid nature of closings as opposed to the very structured nature of openings.

Research Design

To answer the questions that I have posed, I performed a conversational analysis of telephone conversations in Spanish, with primary focus on adjacency pairs and overall organization into stages of openings and closings. Eleven telephone conversations between dyads of native Spanish speakers were audiotaped from the time the telephone began ringing to the final hang-up.

The informants came from a variety of Spanish-speaking countries, all from Latin America. The countries represented were Chile, Cuba, Mexico, Panama , Peru and Puerto Rico; some informants called friends or relatives living in the United States, and some called family in their home countries. In total, there were sixteen women and five men involved in the eleven dyads. In almost all cases, the dyads were comprised of either family members or intimate friends. In one call, the dyad was a more casual acquaintanceship, but of long standing; that is, they were friends, but not close friends. There was one telephone call in which a woman called her family in Chile, and talked to two different members of her family. In this case, I counted them as individual conversations, but only counted the caller once. This explains why the number of participants adds up to twenty-one instead of twenty-two.

All but one of the participants ranged from between 28 to approximately 55 years of age; the one exception was the 18-year-old daughter of the caller to Chile. All come from educated backgrounds, having earned at least a bachelor's degree and in several cases, higher degrees (except for the 18-year-old, who had just finished high school). All personal data on the informants and their conversational partners was supplied by the callers themselves, before they made their calls via oral interview.

Once the data collection was accomplished, I transcribed only those parts of the conversations which were clearly part of the opening or the closing of the conversations. I derived my working definition of opening both from the sequences outlined by Schegloff and from the cultural norms of a typical conversation among Hispanics based on my own experience as

a member of that culture. Regardless of the ultimate purpose of a visit or telephone call, Hispanic etiquette requires that the participants first inquire after the health and/or activities of each other's family members. Therefore, at the beginning of a conversation, as long as the participants were asking about each others' families, I considered it to be part of the opening. Once the topic changed, I determined that to be the end of the greeting, regardless of whether they later returned to discussion of family matters.

Results and Discussion

I examined the data from two perspectives. First, I did a simple count of how many of the categories for openings (Schegloff 1968) and closings (Schegloff and Sacks 1973) appeared in the data, and in what combinations to get an idea of how closely my information fit with the extant theories of universal functions.

As in English, there are certain verbal cues in Spanish that one uses to indicate that s/he would like to terminate the conversation, either face to face or by telephone. These include such interjections as "bueno..." or "pues..." ('well...') followed by a pause, or phrases such as "muchas gracias por la llamada" ('thank you so much for calling') or "me da gusto haber hablado contigo" ('it was good to talk to you'). I searched for such clues in the conversations, and transcribed the closings from that point forward to the actual end of the conversation. Very often, closings were much longer than openings, which is also in line with the function that Schegloff and Sacks propose for preclosing sequences. Since a preclosing leaves open the option for the other party to introduce a new topic of conversation, it could result that there are several preclosing gambits before both speakers decide that they no longer have any new topics to discuss. This obviously implies the possibility of a much longer closing sequence than opening.

In general, it turns out that there are close correspondences, although not necessarily exact matches, between the predicted categories and actual occurrence in Spanish. In this sense, I would argue that the correspondences support the idea of universal functions in telephone conversations across cultures, while the lack of exact fit reflects the cultural differences mentioned by such researchers as Godard (1977) and Sifianou (1989).

After this initial counting step, I returned to look more closely at the actual text to find examples in support of both concordances and differences between the data and the current theories. It is through this textual approach that specific cultural idiosyncracies can be identified, and this will provide the most useful information for application to second language learning. After all, highlighting similarities and differences between one's own culture and another brings them to conscious awareness. Once someone is consciously aware of something, it is much easier for him/her to learn and/or remember that information and to have it consciously accessible when it is needed.

Openings

Schegloff identifies four possible adjacency pair sequences in telephone conversational openings: summons/answer, identification/recognition, greeting sequence, and inquiry sequence. I have previously defined the first two categories. Schegloff (1968: 1080) limits the definition of the greeting sequence to being specifically a second round of "hellos" that follows recognition. He argues that a telephone "hello" in the summons/answer sequence does not serve as a greeting per se, but rather an acknowledgment or answer to the summons of the ringing of the telephone. Therefore, once recognition is achieved, in many cases the participants will do an additional "hello" which functions this time as an actual greeting to a known interactant. The inquiry sequence is very often an extension of the greeting sequence, but apparently since both do not always appear together, Schegloff classified them as two distinct steps in the opening process.

I found examples of all four of these opening sequences in my data. In the table below, I summarize the number of occurrences of each sequence found in eleven samples of telephone conversation.

Clearly, if we look at nothing but the numbers, there appears to be a strong fit with Schegloff's suggested categories. Out of the eleven total conversations, 100% of them included both a summons/response sequence

Table 1. Summary of Opening Sequences

Categories	Number of occurrences	Percentage
Summons/response	11	100%
Identification/recognition	10	100%
Greeting	6	55%
Inquiry	11	100%

and an inquiry sequence. I also argue that there is 100% use of identification/recognition strategies as well. As discussed previously, one of the telephone calls actually involved a single person calling her family in Chile and talking to two different family members; in other words, she was involved in two consecutive conversations in a single call. When the telephone was passed to the second member, both parties of course already knew who was going to be on the line, and so there was no need for this sequence between them. Essentially, the identification/recognition was carried out in advance of the beginning of their conversation.

This means, then, that the only somewhat variable element was the greeting, or some form of second "hello" after the response to the summons. In only seven of the eleven cases, or 55% of the time, did people make use of it, as opposed to 100% for the other sequences. However, that is still a significant percentage. In the other four cases (45%), the participants went

directly from identification/recognition to asking how the other person was, which is a phrase in Spanish that is capable of doing double duty as both greeting and inquiry. In Spanish speaking countries, as well as asking about the other participant, it is often typical to extend this inquiry sequence to ask about the whole family, especially if one is speaking to either a family member, or a close friend whose family is well known to the speaker. As a result, in Spanish this sequence is often more extended than merely an adjacency pair. The following extract is an example of the most typical opening sequences:

0		«rin, rin, rin» (ring, ring, ring)
1	Aurora:	Aló. *Hello.*
2	Ursula:	¿Aló? *Hello?*
3	Aurora:	¿Sí? *Yes?*
4	Ursula:	Hola hermanita. ¿Cómo estás? *Hello, little sister. How are you?*
5	Aurora:	Oh, Ursula. *Oh, Ursula.*
6	Ursula:	¿Cómo estás, qué dices? ¿Estás ocupada? *How are you, what's up? Are you busy?*
7	Aurora:	Acá, cocinando. *I'm just here, cooking.*
...		
19	Ursula:	¿Andan todos bien por la casa? ¿Ramón? ¿Salvador? *How is everyone at home? Ramon? Salvador?*
20	Aurora:	Sí, sí. *Yes, yes.*
21	Ursula:	Están bien. ¿Hay alguna novedad? *Everyone's fine, then. Is there anything new going on?*
22	Aurora:	Nooooo. *Nooooo.*
...		
25	Ursula:	¿Has oído algo de mi mamá o mi papá? *Have you heard anything from mom or dad?*
26	Aurora:	Sí, hablé la semana pasada. *Yes, I talked [to them] last week.*
27	Ursula:	Ya, ¿cómo está mamá? *Yeah? How's mom?*
28	Aurora:	Quería que le enviara algo por su cumpleaños del bebe.... *She wanted me to send her something for the baby's birthday....*

Lines 0 and 1 show the summons/response sequence: "Ring, ring, ring" and "Hello?" Line two shows the beginning of the identification/recognition sequence, which in this case actually takes two talking turns for each participant. In lines 2 and 3 - "Hello?" and "Yes?" - the two sisters are essentially offering voice samples for recognition by the other party, without offering overt identification in either case. According to Schegloff (1979: 50) and Sifianou (1989: 533), this is often a preferred recognition method in American English as well as Greek, at least in personal phone calls. Sifianou characterizes this as evidencing the more positive politeness of Americans and Greeks, showing solidarity with one another (1989: 533). I am inclined to draw a similar conclusion from my own data, since there are only two samples in which the speakers self-identify without waiting for the callee to guess; in a third case, the callee fails to guess, and specifically asks with whom he is talking, forcing the caller to self-identify. Based on this limited data and personal knowledge of the culture, it is tempting to follow the lead of Schegloff (1979) and Sifianou (1989) and identify Hispanic cultures as more positively polite, seeking ways to reaffirm solidarity with each other.

In any case, lines 4 and 5 verify that the two speakers have successfully identified their interlocutors: "Hello little sister," and "Oh, Ursula." The same closure of the identification/ recognition sequence serves the dual function of being the greeting as well. In the case of line 4, which also incorporates the question "How are you?", this combines both the greeting sequence and the inquiry sequence. This combination of the two sequences together in a single sentence is fairly typical: it occurred this way in all seven of the instances in which a greeting was used.

The sister responds to the identification/greeting/inquiry with recognition in line 5 ("Oh, Ursula"), but does not directly answer either the greeting or the question inherent in the caller's recognition response. Perhaps because of this initial lack of response to her inquiry, the caller asks it again, and once her sister answers this question, Ursula moves on to ask about the rest of the family. Such extended inquiry sequences occurred in five of the eleven conversations, normally between either family members or very close friends. In some of the cases where it was not done, either the caller did not know the callee's extended family, or knew that the person did not have family with whom they were in close contact.

Two other interesting variations on other researchers' data which may again provide support for the cultural specificity perspective, and therefore have significance for teaching communicative/pragmatic competence in a second language, are two incidents of apologies for interrupting, and variations on the order of presentation of Schegloff's canonical opening sequences. Godard (1977) insists often that French callers are obliged to apologize for interrupting the callee at some point in their opening sequence, while Americans are not. In either case, apologies were exceptional enough

in my data to stand out as contrary to the norm. In one case, the caller knew he had awakened the callee, and so an apology was obviously in order. The second case is not so clear cut, since there was no apparent reason for an apology, as evidenced by the following dialogue from dyad 6:

0		«rin, rin, rin»
		(ring, ring, ring)
1	Lucas:	¿Aló?
		Hello?
2	Teresa:	Ah, ¿Lucas?
		Um, Lucas?
3	Lucas:	¿Sí?
		Yes?
4	Teresa:	Ah, ¿cómo estás?
		Ah, how are you?
5	Lucas:	¿Con quién hablo?
		Who is this?
6	Teresa:	Soy Teresa. Teresa Portales.
		This is Teresa. Teresa Portales.
7	Lucas:	Ah, ¿cómo estás? ¿Qué tal?
		Oh, how are you? What's up?
8	Teresa:	Bien. Mira, Lucas, ojalá que no te esté molestando.
		I'm fine. Gee, Lucas, I hope I'm not bothering you.

Apparently, this dyad was not as intimate as others, as evidenced by the callee's failure to immediately identify the caller's voice. Perhaps this more distant relationship had a role in the caller's apology. The caller also mentioned before she made the call that she knew her friend was planning to watch a show that was scheduled to start very shortly; this may have been an additional influence on her decision to apologize for interrupting his evening.

The final variable aspect from my data on openings that I would like to discuss is some difference in presentation of the sequence of the elements of openings. The canonical sequence is that proposed by Schegloff which I have cited several times throughout this paper: (1) summons/answer; (2) identification/recognition; (3) greeting tokens; and (4) initial inquiries ("how are you") and answers (Hopper et al. 1991: 370). There was only one sample in my data of this canonical order of adjacency pairs. The table below summarizes the variant sequences I found. Most of these represent instances of the second part of an adjacency pair not following directly from its logical first part; although, in all cases, all the requisite information of an opening sequence is ultimately included in one way or another. For example, in cases where a sequence is not explicitly used, its function is fulfilled in covert ways, such as one person recognizing another's voice from the first word, and bypassing the tentative identification routines to go directly to

the greeting or inquiry sequence.

One interesting aspect which can be noted in the above summary is the frequency with which the recipients answered the opening sequence using

Table 2. Patterns of Opening Sequences and Frequency of Occurrence

Order of sequences	Description	Number of occurrences
1, 2, 4	greeting skipped by both parties	4
1, 2, 3, 4 / 1, 2, 4	caller used canonical order; adjacency pairs disrupted	2
1, 2, 3, 4	"canonical" order with recognizable adjacency pairs	1
1, 3, 4 , 2 / 1, 2, 4	caller inverted order of sequences; callee omitted3	1
1, 3, 2 / 1, 3, 4	caller inverted greeting & ID; callee skipped ID	1
1, 3, 4 / 1, 4	caller skipped ID; after initial response, callee only answered inquiry	1
4	secondary conversation within another conversation; sequences 1-3 not necessary	1
TOTAL		11

The numbers in the left column refer to the sequence number in the list of opening sequences above in Table 1.

only the summons-response (which is required in Hispanic society), and sequence 4 (inquiries) as the common elements. The use of sequences 2 and 3 varies, with 2 being slightly more common than 3. It seems to be a common occurrence that callers can readily identify the callees' voices just from that brief response to the summons ("hello?"), and their next gambit provides enough information for most recipients to be able to recognize the callers' identity. There is seldom any self-identification, as discussed previously. Even so, in most cases there is still some form of overt recognition before moving immediately into the inquiry phase ("Oh, Teresa! How are you?"), which explains the presence of the second category at all.

Category 4, the inquiry sequence, seems to be able to act as a greeting as well as an inquiry, especially when issued by the callee. This is in contrast to English, where it seems to be much more common to hear, for example,

"Oh, Teresa! Hello! How are you?" The second sentence appears to be relatively superfluous for Spanish speakers who are on the receiving end of phone calls, who simply skip from recognition to inquiry, as noted above. While the callers themselves very often use the greeting immediately before the inquiry, without awaiting a response ("Hello! How are you?"), the callees are much more likely to omit it, as seen from information in the table above. It is difficult to postulate why this might be so. Clearly, based on the reactions of both participants in the conversation, this is not perceived as rude or abrupt; it is merely the normal reaction to the caller's greeting and inquiry.

Closings

Conversational closings, which Schegloff and Sacks (1979) call "terminal exchanges," were rather more difficult to determine. Schegloff and Sacks (1979: 303-304) identify markers in American English that they call "preclosings," or indicators that one party is ready to terminate the conversation but is offering the other party the opportunity to open another topic of conversation. These "preclosings" can take various forms, which the authors elaborate throughout the paper. They also emphasize the importance of taking into account surrounding context in determining that a certain word or phrase is functioning as a preclosing marker, since words such as "we-e-el-l-l" or "okay then" can also be used in other contexts that do not necessarily implicate the desire to close the conversation.

In addition, Schegloff and Sacks (1979) describe various stages of the closing (without giving precise names to them), and discuss several of these in their article. These parts of a closing do not all necessarily need to be present, as is also the case with the four sequences in openings, and in fact, they are not always all present in my data in both openings and closings.

Since Schegloff and Sacks do not offer formal names for their closing sequences, I have tentatively put them into the following simplified categories: (1) preclosing, or initiation of the closing sequence (the only category for which Schegloff and Sacks do offer a label); (2) new topic introduction; (3) recapitulation; and (4) final closing. Preclosings have been discussed above. New topic introduction means simply that an introduction of a new topic of conversation after a preclosing gambit. Recapitulation involves a brief summarizing of the topics discussed and/or arrangements made. I have decided to also include such elements as sending best wishes to other family members and other shutting-down details in this category, for the sake of simplicity. Such recapitulation is often an optional element in a personal conversation, although Halmari (1993: 422) indicates that it is almost obligatory in business conversations. Final closings are the actual "goodbyes" or some equivalent appropriate to the specific context of the conversation, such as "Thank you" (generally in business or information-seeking phone calls) or "I'll talk to you later." I have looked for representations of these categories in determining the closing sequences of Spanish

conversations.

Since closing a conversation is not nearly as straightforward as opening one, it is much more difficult to define concrete categories into which one can divide the different tasks involved. This subject was addressed to some extent in a previous section, wherein I also defined the breakdowns I will use for subdividing my data. To review, the categories of closings into which I divided the data are (1) preclosing; (2) introduction of a new topic; (3) recapitulation; and (4) final closing. These sequences are based on Schegloff's categorizations, with some latitude built into the third category, which he does not precisely define. Rather, he enumerates a wide range of possibilities that can fall into a vague category between preclosing and final closing, but which are not exactly new topics of conversation. For that reason, and to simplify the examination of my data, I have accommodated all of these variations under the heading of recapitulation.

As with openings, not all of the elements of closings are evident in all samples. One major difference between openings and closings is that in closings, there is only one element that absolutely has to be present at all times to constitute a terminal exchange: the final closing. While all the other sequences are possible, and even likely, at least in English, they are not required to determine that a conversation has terminated.

Most often, what seems to happen is that one party offers a preclosing word or phrase, and the other party responds to it with initation of a new topic. As explained above, this is perfectly normal, and actually even perhaps expected in many cases. Such alternations of preclosings and new topics will continue until both parties have decided they have nothing new to add. Then the preclosing gambit will be met with a similar preclosing response, and the two participants may either go into a recapitulation routine, or move immediately to the final closing.

My own data reflects patterns very similar to this. In all, there were 37 preclosing gambits, 26 initiations of new topics, 16 recapitulations, and 11 final closings. This last figure, of course, is entirely expected, since there are 11 conversational dyads in the data set, and each one must end with a final closing. Following is a table that outlines the various combinations of sequences identified in the data.

As the table illustrates, and Schegloff predicts based on his proposed purpose of them, preclosings lead in the vast majority of instances to the initiation of a new topic not directly related to anything previously discussed in the conversation. However, there are a few variations which I found rather interesting. Clearly, a preclosing does not have to lead to either a new topic or a recapitulation. In two cases, the preclosing resulted directly in the final closing. Nor do either of these need to follow directly after a preclosing, as we can see by the few cases in which a series of functions started with recapitulation rather than preclosing.

What is most intriguing, from my perspective, is the circular nature of the process. This is displayed in the cases where a preclosing might look

Table 3. Closing Sequence Combinations and Frequencies

Closing sequence combinations	Number of occurrences
preclosing + new topic	19
preclosing + recapitulation + final closing	6
preclosing + recapitulation + new topic	4
preclosing + final closing	2
preclosing + recapitulation + preclosing + new topic	2
recapitulation + final closing	2
recapitulation + new topic	1
preclosing + recapitulation + preclosing + final close	1
Total	37

like it was headed into the final countdown, so to speak, only to take a turn and have a new topic introduced after the recapitulation, or go through a series of alternating preclosings, recapitulations, and/or new topics. This variability emphasizes the individuality and unpredictability of the communication process and highlights the difficulty of trying to analyze the process. However, it is still possible to make some tentative predictions based on the data above.

For instance, despite the two exceptions where a closing segment began with the recapitulation, it is evident that the vast majority of such sequences began with preclosing statements of some kind. Hence, one could reasonably predict that it is difficult to close down a conversation without a preclosing. In fact, the instances that begin with recapitulations arise from previous instances of a preclosing plus new topic initiation. After a few exchanges on the new topic, one of the speakers utters a recapitulative statement instead of returning all the way to the preclosing. An example of this from dyad 1 follows:

49 Ana: Está bien. Muchísimas gracias porque todavía no estoy completamente bien del catarro que me dió.
Okay, then. Thanks a lot, because I'm still not completely over that cold I caught.

50 María: Sí. A mí también me tomó como tres semanas. Bueno, tú también te acuerdas ... pensé que me moría.
Yes. It took me about three weeks also. Well, you remember too, I thought I was going to die.

51 Ana: Sí.
Yeah.

52 María: Pero esa medicina china que mi mamá me lo compró me dió un buen resultado ... bueno, tómatela... y mañana si te sientes mal, no te puedes concentrar ... y es una barbaridad, así es que no te olvides de tomar.
But that herbal medicine my mom bought for me worked

really well... so take it... and tomorrow, if you feel bad, you won't be able to concentrate, which is horrible, so, don't forget to take it.

53 Ana: No, no se me olvida.
No, I won't forget.

54 María: Eso no tiene efecto secundario, no te va a poner a dormir ni nada. Al contrario...
And it doesn't have any side effects, it won't make you sleepy or anything.
Actually...

55 Ana: Comienzo a cantar. (risas)
I'll start singing. (laughter)

56 María: Bueno, Ana, como no te voy a ver. ¡Que tengas suerte mañana!...
Well, Ana, it's not like I won't see you. Good luck tomorrow!

57 Ana: Así haré.
I hope so.

58 María: Dime una cosa, a lo mejor paso por ahí. ¿Quieres que te lleve una coca cola o algo a esa hora?
Tell me something, I might be stopping by there. Do you want me to bring you a Coke or anything about then?

59 Ana: Tal vez una coca cola fría.
Maybe a cold Coke.

...

60 María: Pues sí. Entonces, yo te la llevo... Bueno, Ana, saluda a Bernardo y hablamos entonces.
Okay, then. I'll bring it to you then. Well, Ana, say hello to Bernardo, and I'll talk to you later.

61 Ana: Gracias, hablamos. Chao.
Thanks. Talk to you later. Bye.

In line one, Ana thanks María for an offer of some herbal medicine, and gives a possible indication that she would like to close the conversation: "Okay, then. Thanks a lot because I'm still not completely over that cold I caught." This could be interpreted as containing both a preclosing and a recapitulative, since she's summing up their previous discussion about medicine. However, it is not an unmistakeable preclosing, and apparently María doesn't take it as such, since she launches into a discussion of her previous cold. Ana answers her with a monosyllable ("Yes"), which is often read as a discouragement to further conversation.

María still does not accept the preclosing gambit immediately, however. The information about the medicine from her mother might be somewhat working towards that, although this is not entirely obvious. Then her trailing statement, "So take it..." could be clearly construed as a preclosing,

which she then converts to a more drawn-out reason why her friend should remember to take the medicine. Ana offers another terse reply: "No, I won't forget." And so the conversation continues on, with Ana replying shortly, proffering little encouragement for continued conversation, and María refusing these preclosing gambits.

Finally, María herself utters a statement that could be interpreted as a recapitulation: "Well, it's not like I won't see you. Good luck tomorrow!" Ana follows this with another brief reply, "I hope so." But then, once again María introduces a new topic, the offer to bring Ana a Coke during her exam. They discuss this for one or two exchanges, and then María presents another recapitulation, and a statement that can easily be construed as a final closing: "Okay, I'll bring it to you then. Say hello to Bernardo for me." At this point, Ana replies with a goodbye, and the conversation terminates.

It is interesting, although perhaps not significant, that this particular conversation did not end until the caller herself finally decided she was ready to terminate it. Does this mean, then, that it is up to the caller to give final closure to a conversation? Not necessarily, according to the rest of the data. While the caller typically offers more preclosing gambits than the callee (26 as compared to 11 for the callee), the final closings are initiated approximately equally between the two, with callers performing six of them and callees, five.

In addition, new topics were initiated almost equally, with a slight advantage to the callee: callers introduced 11 new topics as compared to the callees' 15. Recapitulations were offered 10 times by callers, and 6 times by the callees. These numbers are summarized in the table below.

Finally, an interesting little phenomenon occurred in the final closing itself. Schegloff speaks of adjacency pairs, in which an initial utterance prompts a coordinated response from the hearer. In the final closing, I did find such pairs. However, I also encountered, with equal frequency, final closings in triplets rather than pairs. One person would utter "Goodbye,"

Table 4. Frequencies of Termination Exchanges: Dynamics of Termination Exchanges

	Caller	Callee	Totals
Who initiates preclosings?	26	11	37
Who initiates new topics?	11	15	26
Who initiates recapitulations?	10	6	16
Who initiates final closings?	6	5	11

the second would respond in kind, and then the first person would repeat it once more before hanging up. There did not appear to be any attempt by the other interlocutor to match this repetition by the first person, which leaves the interaction in a triplet rather than a pair. The following excerpt is an example of this:

35 Natalia: Chao.
Bye.
36 Wanda: Cuídate también. Chao.
You take care, too. Bye.
37 Natalia: Chao.
Bye.

In the data set there are five such examples of final closing triplets, compared to six for adjacency pairs. So, clearly, such occurrences of triplets are fairly natural and common. In trying to determine a possible reason for this, the numbers do not appear to offer any significant help. I have tabulated them below to aid in visualizing the breakdowns. In addition, I have shown whether it is caller or callee who wants to capture this last word.

There is little mention of such triplets in the telephone exchange literature, although one researcher, Amy Tsui (1989), makes a strong case for their importance in conversational exchanges in general. Perhaps it is much more common in face to face exchanges than in telephone conversations. Alternatively, it could merely be that other researchers have not felt it significant enough to report in their data. For me, it is an interesting phenomenon that might or might not have greater significance. There is no way to know this without exploring further and seeing just how widespread an occurrence it really is. In the same way, it is difficult to say why it might have occurred with such regular frequency in my own data, since I do have so little data on which to base any definite conclusions. One possibility could be as simple as personal style; perhaps those people who did it just have a need to get in the last word before hanging up the phone.

Table 5. Adjacency Pairs vs. Triplets: Who Gets the Last Word In?

	Caller	Callee
Adjacency pairs	3	3
Adjacency triplets	3	2

Based on this limited data, it is difficult to definitively say that one participant or the other tends to play a greater role in terminating the interaction. Perhaps the best interpretation for these numbers is that they prove, once again, to what extent the act of communicating is a socially constructed experience, and the importance of the active participation of all the interactants.

Another notable point I found in looking at the data is that the international calls generally had much longer closings than local calls or domestic long distance calls. For example, one call from the United States to Peru had eight preclosing attempts before the call finally terminated; another to

Peru, between different interactants, had five. Similarly, the woman who called Chile attempted four preclosing gambits with her daughter, and five with her mother before successfully terminating the respective conversations. On average, local calls and domestic long distance calls required about two preclosing gambits before closure was reached.

One reason for this could be that there is a much greater possibility that people will call locally or domestic long distance more often than they will call internationally. Hence, there is less "new" news that happens between telephone calls, and it is consequently easier to terminate the conversation. On the other hand, when the length of time increases between phone calls, not only is there more time for new things to occur in the respective lives of the participants, but there could also be an increased anxiety to talk to the other party. For this reason, people will look for reasons or excuses to maintain contact with their loved ones for as long as possible.

Summary and Conclusions

The data presented in this current work supports Schegloff's and Hopper's assertions of certain conversational universals across languages and cultures, especially relating to telephone discourse. Both of these researchers outline elements of telephone openings and closings, focusing on similarities across cultures. Hopper and Koleilat-Doany (1989: 176) state it plainly in regard to openings: "Certainly we do not claim that every telephone opening sounds just like those in the United States. Rather, there is a certain set of jobs that must get accomplished to do the opening of a state of conversational speaking."

This certain set of jobs is performed by the informants in my data, in accomplishing both openings and closings. The four standard opening sequences identified by Schegloff and summarized by Hopper recur constantly in the conversations, and the same is true of the four basic phases of a closing. The only significant difference is that such sequences may not occur in Schegloff's canonical order, or may not be explicitly present. In the latter case, the function performed by the explicitly missing sequence is always implied in another sequence.

In regard to the original questions I set out to answer, it is quite apparent that there is indeed a formulaic approach to both opening and closing a conversation. The easy manner in which the data analyzed in this study fits into the typologies which Schegloff has elaborated verifies the routinized nature especially of conversational openings. On the other hand, it was somewhat more challenging to try to match the data to distinct closing sequences, since a single utterance could potentially be interpreted in various ways. Even so, it is still fairly clear that there are certain strategies that conversational partners use to indicate their readiness to terminate a conversation. I have identified a few of these potential preclosing indicators in my data set, and then followed them through the rest of the conversation

to determine how they function within the context of the dialogue, in conjunction with initiation of new topics of conversation, recapitulation techniques as other indicators of desire to terminate, and final closings. As a result of these analyses, it is clear that there is a process, but it is not so clear which interlocutor is preferred for which part of the process. According to my data, either participant can initiate any stage of the closing process, and either partner also has equal right to ignore such closing attempts to introduce new topics of conversation.

I think that the differences that have been noted between English, French, Greek and Spanish conversational patterns, according to the various investigations to which I have compared my data, can be safely related to the specific cultural paradigms within which telephone usage has developed in those cultures. I agree with Hopper, however, that such local, specific differences do not significantly alter the conversational functions being performed within those varying semantic constructions. The evidence presented by the researchers arguing from a cultural specificity standpoint does not stand up under close scrutiny in terms of representing some new aspect that Schegloff has missed, or of trying to undermine the universalist argument. Rather, it serves merely to reinforce the fact that, yes, there are cultural differences between societies, and different ways of performing essentially the same communicative work.

I recognize that there are limitations to my own work. The most significant of these, of course, is the small size of my data sample. Due to the small sample, my conclusions can be considered suggestive rather than conclusive. Another possible constraint is the very broad, pan-Hispanic focus I have taken. Because this is such a preliminary work, I felt it was more important merely to get some information into the field on Spanish as a whole, since it was so conspicuously lacking in the literature. However, perhaps the debate can also be enlightened by a focus on specific regional differences within the Spanish speaking world itself. Latin American Spanish is not a uniform, monolithic entity. It is possible that some of the differences I have described in responses within the dyads has some relation to such regional differences. However, I do not have enough data to elucidate this issue, and thus the present work tends to simplify the case into universalities.

Additionally, cross-cultural studies which have already begun could further benefit from the inclusion of data on Spanish. It is to be hoped that my own contribution will offer some ideas for other researchers to follow, so that they may design more cross-cultural studies which include Spanish data. Even something as close to home as more studies involving bilingual Spanish speakers in the United States would contribute to this effort.

My work presents information on only one type of telephone discourse, that of personal phone calls among intimates. Similar work on other types of telephone discourse, such as generational differences in telephone usage or business conversations in Spanish, would also further this field of

study. Considering the focus on the use of Spanish in the business world in the present day, this latter focus could have significant implications for helping second language learners master communicative and pragmatic competence in the business environment.

Educational Implications

Wolfson (1989: 96) emphasizes the importance of knowing different cultural norms when one is learning a foreign language: "This little rule, as insignificant as it may seem, is extremely important to the learner... who might, if not shown how the two frames work, use the wrong one and thereby be misunderstood." Such knowledge feeds into a learner's communicative and/or pragmatic competence in the target language and culture, as noted above. Such studies provide concrete information to teachers who must teach the norms of daily Spanish usage to their learners; at a very pragmatic level, communicative competence on the telephone is something that is not currently emphasized in most Spanish education curricula. Perhaps if there were more solid information for the teachers to use, they could translate this into practice exercises for the classroom.

This Spanish data could also be used as a comparative tool to teach English to speakers of Spanish, if it is used in a supplementary, comparative/contrastive fashion in conjunction with the English data they need to learn. A final possible use of such studies as these is to provide a practical example of an everyday situation which all students encounter, as a springboard to a lesson on differences and similarities between the native culture and the target culture.

The above are just some possible applications of telephone conversational analysis. Clearly, it is a wide-open field, and I believe researchers and educators can and should find ways to explore and apply it in all its variety inside and outside the classroom.

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